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SMITH, Truman

Anaesthesia! The greatest  
discovery of the age! Who is  
entitled to the credit of it?  
(New York, 1859.)

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# ANÆSTHESIA!

THE GREATEST DISCOVERY OF THE AGE!

WHO IS ENTITLED TO THE CREDIT OF IT?

Let those read who desire to know the Truth.

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*From the Journal of Commerce.*

MESSRS. EDITORS: I observe in your paper of the 6th instant, an article headed "National Testimonial to the Discoverer of Anæsthesia," in which it is stated that a meeting of medical gentlemen had been recently held at the residence of Dr. Willard Parker, to provide such a testimonial for the purpose indicated, and that Drs. Valentine Mott, John W. Francis, Joseph M. Smith, Gurdon Buck, James R. Wood, Willard Parker, John Watson, J. Marvin Sims, and James Minor, were appointed a Committee to that end. If this were all, I could not interpose the slightest objection to the movement. On the contrary, it would be in my judgment in the highest degree praiseworthy, as the effort, if successful and directed in conformity with the truth, would make some provision for the destitute family of the late Horace Wells, of Hartford, who, I affirm and can prove, was the real author of this great boon to humanity.

But I observe, with concern, that this opening statement is followed with an address to the public, in which the whole merit of having discovered a competent agent for anæsthetic purposes is accorded to Wm. T. G. Morton, of Boston, and therefore it is obvious that the purpose of the meeting was to provide some testimonial in his favor.

This will be apparent from the following extract:

"Wine and strong alcoholic drinks, in such quantity as to induce intoxication, were occasionally employed, even before the commencement of the present century, for rendering persons insensible to the pain of surgical operations. With the same end in view, some surgeons, addressing the intellect, were in the habit of exciting sudden fear, alarm, or astonishment, to divert the attention of their patients. Others, again, resorted to the uncertain and inexplicable influence of mesmerism. Still more recently, the nitrous oxyd gas, administered by inhalation, has, as originally suggested by Sir Humphrey Davy, been employed for producing temporary loss of consciousness. But this, too, after a fair trial, has failed, and the hopes founded upon it have proved nugatory and delusive. So that up to this point, the want of a reliable agent for rendering the human body insensible to pain—a want so long felt, and to obviate which so many fruitless efforts have been made—was still to be supplied. That want, however, has since been fully met.

"The first great triumph of placing in the hands of the Profession an agent capable of rendering the patient safely, and at will, utterly insensible to the stroke of the surgeon's knife, was in detecting and establishing by experiment the anæsthetic powers of sulphuric ether. For this discovery the world is indebted to Dr. Wm. T. G. Morton, of Boston.

"Whatever may have been the steps preliminary to this remarkable discovery, Dr. Morton's claim to it is established beyond all controversy, and his merit in this respect, with those who have taken the trouble to inform themselves on the subject, can be no longer a question of dispute."

I observe that this address is not signed by any body. I am quite sure it could not have been seen or approved by Dr. Willard Parker, as on the occasion of a Congressional inquiry on the subject in 1852, he gave an affidavit directly the reverse. Let the public read and ponder, as follows, namely:

"I, Willard Parker, of the city and county of New-York, Doctor of Medicine and Professor of Surgery in the College of the Physicians and Surgeons of the University of the State of New-York, being duly cautioned and sworn, do depose and say that I graduated at the Harvard University, State of Massachusetts, in 1826, and afterwards, as a Doctor of Medicine, in the same University.

"I have been engaged as a public teacher of medical and surgical science for more than twenty years. While an academical student at Cambridge I became acquainted with the influence and effect of nitrous oxyd gas upon the human system.

"In the spring of 1831, during the course of public lectures in the Vermont Medical College (then the Clinical School of Medicine) at Woodstock, the students of my class, after having used nitrous oxyd gas prepared for them by the chemical professor, took up the use of sulphuric ether, and they were in the habit of making themselves *intoxicated and insensible* by its inhalation. I finally checked them in the employment of the ether, *fearing deleterious effects.*"

"I further say that I then observed that the operation and influence

of the above agents, when inhaled, were very similar. It has long been known that nitrous oxyd gas, sulphuric ether, chloric ether, and like substances, would produce intoxication and some insensibility; but it was not known that these agents could be so employed as to suspend all sensibility during surgical operations, and that too, with safety, *until the discovery of the late Horace Wells*. I further say that it being known that nitrous oxyd gas would produce anæsthesia in surgical operations, it would suggest to any one having any knowledge of the two substances that sulphuric ether would produce the same effects, and that the substitution of the ether for the gas, *does not in my opinion merit the name of discovery*. The merit should, in my judgment, be awarded to the man who first applied either of these agents for anæsthetic purposes; and *I am very confident and strong in the opinion, that man was the late Horace Wells, of Hartford*, and further this deponent says not.

"New-York, Nov. 26th, 1852.

W. PARKER.

"Sworn to before me this 13th day of December, 1852.

"HENRY A. KERR, *Commissioner of Deeds*."

I am equally sure that the same address could not have been seen or approved by Dr. Valentine Mott, as he also, on the same occasion, gave an affidavit directly the reverse, as follows, namely:

"I, Valentine Mott, of the city of New-York, surgeon, do affirm that the first intimation I ever had of the probable application of the influence of the nitrous oxyd or sulphuric ether to obliterate all consciousness of pain in surgical operations, was derived from the late Dr. Wells, of Harford.

"When on a visit to New-York, he called on me and made the fact known. *He said he had used ether for the extraction of teeth, and he believed it might be employed for the same purpose in great surgical operations*. As he first applied ether for the purpose of producing anæsthesia, he is fully entitled to the credit and honors of the discovery.

"This interview was some time before any publication was made any where on the subject. My impression is, that as various chemical agents will produce anæsthesia, they all may be used with proper care; I began with sulphuric ether, but after Dr. Simpson, of Edinburgh, sent me his pamphlet, I immediately had the chloroform made and used it ever since, and am perfectly satisfied with it.

"New-York, Dec. 20th, 1852.

VALENTINE MOTT.

"Sworn to before me, this 23d day of Dec. 1852.

"HENRY A. KERR, *Com. of Deeds*."

I am also sure that the address could not have been seen or approved by Dr. JOHN W. FRANCIS, as he likewise has, on said occasion, given an affidavit directly the reverse, as follows:



"NEW-YORK, November 26th, 1852.

"I hereby testify to all whom it may concern, that I have exercised the duties of a practitioner of medicine for the period of forty-one years; that at an early period of my medical career, I became acquainted with the fact that several agents, as the nitrous oxyd gas, chloric ether, and other intoxicating substances, were capable of producing on the human constitution diminished sensibility; but that anæsthesia, as now practised, is of a much more recent date, and *I fully believe that the anæsthetic principle by inhalation of gaseous substances in surgical and other operations*, was introduced and established by the *late Horace Wells*. The well-known sedative effects of sulphuric and other ethers might readily suggest to the scientific mind their substitution for nitrous oxyd gas, and the application of any one of these agents might be fairly recognized as the primary discovery.

"JOHN W. FRANCIS, M. D.,

"Late Professor, etc., New-York.

"Sworn to before me, this 13th day of Dec., 1852.

"HENRY A. KERR, Com. of Deeds."

I deem it proper to state that these three affidavits were obtained by myself, after full consultation and conference with Doctors Parker, Mott, and Francis, with a view to their use before the Senate of the United States, of which body I was then a member. They have remained in my hands to the present day, and are open to the inspection of all who take an interest in the subject.

I now say that I can prove, by a whole cloud of witnesses from the city of Hartford, such men as the Right Rev. Bishop Brownell, ex-Chief-Justice Williams, Senator James Dixon, Drs. P. W. Ellsworth, Eli Hall, G. B. Hawley, S. B. Beresford, David Crary, and C. A. Tafts; Dentists Jno. M. Riggs, Jno. B. Ferry, and E. E. Crofoot, and citizens Daniel Clarke, Jno. Braddock, Thomas Steele, Jno. Gaylord Wells, Norman W. Goodrich, and others too numerous to mention, that the opinions so strongly expressed by Drs. Parker, Mott, and Francis are founded on truth. They have already spoken to that effect, under oath, and will again say, if need be, not only that they are "very confident and strong in the opinion" (to use the emphatic language of Dr. Parker) that H. W. was the first to apply an available agent, to wit, the nitrous oxyd gas, for anæsthetic purposes, but most of them will add that they positively know the fact to be so.

But by far the most exceptionable part of the above extract is a statement, which I deem it proper to reproduce as a sample of inexcusable meanness and presumption. It is as follows: "Still more recently the nitrous oxyd gas, administered by inhalation, has, as originally suggested by Sir Humphrey Davy, been employed to produce a temporary loss of consciousness. *But this after a fair trial failed*, and the hopes founded upon it have proved nugatory and delusive." Here is an admission that before Morton entered on his experiments, somebody had tried nitrous oxyd gas. Was it not mean



in the writer to conceal from the public the name of H. W., when he well knew that that unfortunate gentlemen made the trial? and was it not equally mean to intimate that anæsthesia, in the modern sense of that word as connected with the nitrous oxyd gas, should be attributed to Sir H. Davy, thus seeking to create the impression that Wells must have derived his idea from that source, and was it not more than mean—was it not base and presumptuous in the last degree, to assert that “after a fair trial this agent has failed, and the hopes founded upon it have proved nugatory and delusive”?

Behold how a plain and succinct narrative will put down this presumption. On the evening of the 10th of Dec., 1844, nearly twenty-two months before Morton pretended to have made any discovery in Boston, H. W. and lady attended an exhibition by one G. Q. Colton, of the nitrous oxyd (usually called the laughing) gas, at Hartford, which he inhaled himself, and which was inhaled by several others, among whom was a young gentleman who performed some extraordinary gyrations and pranks among the benches, and barked his shins pretty extensively. When he came to himself, Mr. Wells immediately propounded several interrogatories, and ascertained from him that he was not conscious of the slightest injury till he saw the blood trickling down his legs. Mr. Wells turned to a bystander, and remarked that he believed the nitrous oxyd could be used for the extraction of teeth without pain, and repeated the same remark to Mrs. Wells on his way home, on being reproached by her for making himself ridiculous before a public assembly in taking the nitrous oxyd. Full of this idea he went to rest, and rising early the next morning, declared that he would have the experiment tried that day (Dec. 11) on himself, and accordingly Mr. Colton administered the gas. A large molar tooth was extracted, and when Wells awoke to consciousness, he exclaimed: “*A new era in tooth-pulling!* It did not hurt me any more than the prick of a pin!” Here was the first conception and the first parturition of Anæsthesia, in the modern sense of the word. What did Wells do? Did he take a patent as Morton did? Not at all. He made a present of his great discovery to humanity, for he was the most generous of men. He immediately communicated the facts to his brother dentists of Hartford, and they all at once embarked in the practice of anæsthesia with the nitrous oxyd, and continued that practice till it was ascertained that other agents were equally efficacious and safe, and much more convenient. I verily believe that I can prove that teeth enough were extracted in the city of Hartford, without pain, by the use of the nitrous oxyd during the two years that followed the discovery, *to fill a half-peck measure*. In the mean time, several capital operations were performed by the surgeons of Hartford, without pain, by the same means, one of which, namely, cutting off the leg of H. A. Goodale by Dr. P. W. Ellsworth, which took place January 1st, 1848, and may be found reported in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, vol. 37, p. 498; and yet the writer of the address has the audacity to say that the nitrous oxyd gas “after a fair trial has failed, and the hopes founded upon it have proved nugatory and delusive.” Failed, good Doctor! How do you know

it? I affirm that it never has been used as an anæsthetic agent in this city, simply for the reason, that after the idea of anæsthesia had been fully developed, more convenient, not more efficacious agents were discovered. The nitrous oxyd is a mere gas, is troublesome to prepare and purify, and has to be administered by means of a bag of considerable size. Whereas sulphuric ether, chloric ether, and chloroform are liquids which can be carried about in bottles, and readily exhibited to patients by the agency of a sponge.

"Failed!" says this address-maker. But have you been to Hartford, to inquire into the facts? Have you taken any the slightest pains to inform yourself? Inquiry at the only place where the nitrous oxyd was ever used extensively would seem to be indispensable. "Failed!" forsooth! Good doctor! but we can bring the matter to a short issue. Do you prepare a good supply of the nitrous oxyd, (thoroughly purified,) and I will bring from the city of Hartford, Mr. John M. Riggs, a very capable dentist, and I engage that he shall, by using the nitrous oxyd, extract as many teeth without pain as your Wm. T. G. Morton can by the use of sulphuric ether or any other agent.

But the fact is, that Horace Wells discovered the anæsthetic properties of sulphuric ether at an early day, and long before experimentation by Morton. In a former communication I stated that the ether was used only once at Hartford, but I find on examination I was mistaken. It was used twice—once in removing a tumor, and once in extracting a tooth, and in both instances, early in 1845. The operator in the first instance was Dr. E. E. Marey, then of Hartford, but now of this city, and the public are referred to that gentleman for the facts. Having made this additional discovery, he (Wells) came to this city, and made the fact known to Dr. Mott, as stated in his deposition. It is true he did not use the ether to any considerable extent, as he was apprehensive of the consequences. He knew that the nitrous oxyd was safe, but he did not know this in respect to sulphuric ether. Therefore, like a prudent man, he adhered to the former. Was he to blame for this? Did not Dr. Parker deem the use of ether hazardous, and did he not warn his students against it?

But if the fact were otherwise, and Morton first ascertained the anæsthetic properties of the ether, such ascertainment does not, in my judgment, merit the name of discovery; the truth is, anæsthesia is nothing but getting men and women drunk by inhalation of certain gaseous substances, in place of throwing them into the same state by imbibition of alcoholic liquids. In the former case, you operate on the system, through the lungs, and in the latter through the stomach. It is just as absurd to call the substitution of sulphuric ether for the nitrous oxyd a discovery, as it would be to call exhilaration by cognac brandy *such* after it had been well ascertained that rum, gin, and whiskey would produce the same effect.

It is thus indisputable that Wells was the first to discover the principles of anæsthesia, and the first to introduce it into practice. He used two competent agents, the nitrous oxyd and the sulphuric ether, but principally the former. Wells had his home in the city of Hartford,

but had been in copartnership with Morton, in Boston, in the practice of the dental art. I have in my hands proof conclusive that the partnership continued down to as late a date as September, 1844, when it was dissolved by mutual consent. It is susceptible of the clearest proof that Morton was well posted as to the discoveries of W. It is not possible for me to enter very much into these proofs within the limits to which I am restricted. But the discovery of Wells was announced in the newspapers of the day, and was the subject of much comment. In the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, of June 18th, 1845, vol. 32, p. 389, is a communication from the pen of P. W. Ellsworth, M.D., of Hartford, from which I make the following extract : “ *The nitrous oxyd has been used in quite a number of cases by our dentists during the extraction of teeth, and has been found by its excitement perfectly to destroy pain. The patients appear very merry during the operation and no unpleasant effects follow.*” Here is anæsthesia announced, nay printed and published in Boston, as being in full operation fifteen months before Morton pretends to have discovered any thing. But it is useless to pursue this topic any further. Considering the intimacy between Wells and Morton, the fact that they had been partners, that Morton had lived at Farmington, only nine miles from Hartford, and married his wife in that neighborhood, and considering also the great publicity given to the proceedings of Wells, it is certain Morton knew all about them. Indeed, he has admitted in express terms that he “ took the idea from Wells, who (he added) failed and he (Morton) went on perfecting the discovery till it resulted in the use of sulphuric ether.” He *took the idea from Dr. Wells!* It would have been more truthful if he had said he took anæsthesia fully developed and established from Dr. Wells.

Morton admits that he did not make his first experiment until the 30th of September, 1846, nearly twenty-two months after the discovery of Wells. There is no doubt but that Morton had shortly previously conceived the idea of trying to turn this matter to account. He applied to Dr. Charles T. Jackson for information as to the nature and property of sulphuric ether. I am confident that he derived from Jackson whatever ability he had to deal with the subject. Indeed, so sensible was he of the obligation he was under to Jackson, that he admitted him to a joint and equal participation with himself in whatever of credit was to result from the supposed discovery in their application for a patent. Morton united with Jackson not only in stating, but swearing, that the discovery of the applicability of sulphuric ether for anæsthetic purposes was the result of their joint efforts. But now Morton is the sole discoverer! How the author of the address can assert a fact to be one way when Morton has sworn positively that it was the other, I am at a loss to conceive. But I do not concern myself about the quarrel between Morton and Jackson; I only advert to the treatment which the latter has received at the hands of the former, to illustrate character. There is no mistaking the case.

But I do take a deep interest in the case of the unfortunate Wells. It is true the contest has hitherto been an unequal one. I have stood



almost alone. In the first instance, I was called to the investigation of this subject in the discharge of my public duties. On a full and careful examination, I came unhesitatingly to the conclusion that Wells was the true and only author of anæsthesia. I have not seen the slightest cause to change my opinion. Certain parties in this city may rest assured they can not put down my cause by a mere parade of names, however respectable they may be. I am dealing with hard, stubborn facts, which stand out in front of my case, and no diligence shall be wanting on my part to make them known to the world. I avow myself an admirer of the name and character of Horace Wells, (notwithstanding his miserable end,) a name which should be as dear to mankind as that of Jenner. I am the friend of his destitute family, and the vindicator of their interests and rights. Not a particle of interest have I in the subject. The story of my motives is told in a few words—I *hate imposture* and *commiserate* the poor widow and the fatherless.

TRUMAN SMITH.

New-York, December, 1858.

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*For the Journal of Commerce.*

## WHO DISCOVERED ANÆSTHESIA ?

Statement of Drs. Mott, Francis, and Parker.

The undersigned, fearing that the public may be misled by the republication at this time of certain affidavits made by them in the month of December, 1852, in which we severally asserted our belief that Horace Wells, of Hartford, Connecticut, was the original discoverer of the anæsthetic principle as applied to the removal of pain in surgical operations, which affidavits were made by us at the solicitation, and in consequence of the representations of the Hon. Truman Smith, then United States Senator from Connecticut; we feel it to be our duty to state that *a subsequent and careful examination of the facts in the history of the discovery of Anæsthesia have led us to a different conclusion.*

The undersigned coincide in the belief that "the first great triumph of placing in the hands of the profession an agent capable of rendering the patient safely, and at will, utterly insensible to the stroke of the surgeon's knife, was in detecting and establishing by experiment the anæsthetic powers of sulphuric ether. For this discovery the world is indebted to Dr. Wm. T. G. Morton, of Boston.

"Whatever may have been the steps preliminary to this remarkable discovery, Dr. Morton's claim to it is established beyond all controversy, and his merit in this respect, with those who have taken the trouble to inform themselves on the subject, can be no longer a question of dispute."

Holding this opinion, they have signed the "Appeal of Members of the Medical Profession," in this city and Boston, to establish a na-

tional testimonial, by voluntary subscription, for the benefit of Dr. Wm. T. G. Morton, and have united in recommending his claims for remuneration to the consideration of their fellow-citizens, and of soliciting their subscriptions in behalf of the fund.

VALENTINE MOTT, M.D.,  
WILLARD PARKER, M.D.

NEW-YORK, December 17th, 1858.

I hereby respectfully set forth, that my concurrence in the recommendation of Dr. Morton's claims for public remuneration was grounded on the *conclusive* evidence that through his experiments, perseverance, and energy, it was made manifest that sulphuric ether might be used as an effective anæsthetic agent in surgical operations. To Dr. Morton's early devotion, I believe the world is indebted for the important knowledge we possess on this subject, so interesting to humanity.

JOHN W. FRANCIS, M.D.

*From the Journal of Commerce.*

MESSRS. EDITORS : In penning the article which appeared in your columns of the 16th instant on the subject above named, I had not the slightest idea of bringing reproach on the distinguished Professors Parker, Mott, and Francis, by the production of the explicit affidavits which they saw fit to give in 1852 to be used before the United States Senate in favor of the late Horace Wells as the true author of Anæsthesia. It is true that the learned gentlemen had placed themselves in the unenviable attitude of addressing to the Senate in 1852, under oath one opinion, and in now certifying to the public another, but I thought that I could find some apology for, or explanation of this singular incongruity in the oblivious effect of numerous and urgent professional engagements, and the lapse of time.

I regret, however, to observe that these gentlemen have by a card inserted in your paper of the 18th instant, deprived me of this resource of charity, and I have to say, that should it turn out that they have by this act placed themselves in a *very serious predicament before the public*, they will have themselves to blame, not me.

Two of these learned Doctors, namely, Messrs. Parker and Mott, open their apology as follows : "The undersigned, fearing that the public may be misled by the publication at this time of *certain affidavits made by them in the month of December, 1852, in which we severally asserted our belief that Horace Wells, of Hartford, Connecticut, was the original discoverer of the anæsthetic principle as applied to the removal of pain in surgical operations*, WHICH AFFIDAVITS WERE MADE BY US AT THE SOLICITATION AND IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE HON. TRUMAN SMITH, then United States Senator from Connecticut, we feel it to be our duty," etc.

On this subject the following remarks, it is believed, will be deemed appropriate :

(1.) These gentlemen admit that they did in December, 1852, and comparatively within a brief period after this great discovery was made, declare under oath their full belief that the whole credit thereof should be awarded to Mr. Wells. The language of Dr. Parker, as will appear by recurring to his affidavit, was peculiarly emphatic: "*The merit,*" he says "*should in my judgment be awarded to the man who first applied either of these agents*" (meaning nitrous oxyd gas, sulphuric ether, chloric ether, and the like substances) "*for anæsthetic purposes, and I AM VERY CONFIDENT AND STRONG IN THE OPINION THAT MAN WAS THE LATE HORACE WELLS, OF HARTFORD.*"

(2.) They introduce into their excuse the word "*solicitation,*" they made, they say, "the affidavit at the solicitation" of the Senator from Connecticut. I know of no reason why I should address to these learned gentlemen solicitations. I had not, nor have I ever had, one particle of interest in the subject. It is true that Morton was making a grab at \$100,000 in the United States Treasury on grounds which I verily believed to constitute a case of "false pretenses," and it was my duty to hunt up the facts to the end that truth might be vindicated and justice done.

(3.) But an extraordinary part of the statement of Messrs. Parker and Mott is, that they made their affidavits, or in other words, swore as they did, "*IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE REPRESENTATIONS of the Hon. Truman Smith, then United States Senator from Connecticut!*" This would seem to involve two pleas in bar of their former oath-taking; the first is "*ignoramus,*" that they were entirely ignorant on the subject, and the second that they were seduced by a Senator into the declaration of "strong and confident opinions," when they had not investigated the subject, and had no grounds on which to base an opinion of any sort. Can this be so? Are the learned Professors and Doctors of this city, whose opinions on scientific subjects are often of the last importance in settling questions of private right, in the habit of giving *such accommodating affidavits*? If so, I would suggest that were some of them to open an office in the vicinage of the City Hall they might possibly drive a very lucrative business.

(4.) But you, Dr. Valentine Mott, are grossly mistaken when you say, or intimate you were seduced into swearing to an opinion on a subject of which you knew nothing, for in your affidavit you state a most pregnant fact, as follows: "*The first intimation I ever had of the probable application of the nitrous oxyd or sulphuric ether to obliterate all consciousness of pain in surgical operations, was derived from the late Horace Wells, of Hartford; when on a visit to New-York he called on me and made the fact known. He said he had used ether for the extraction of teeth, and he believed it might be employed for the same purpose in great surgical operations.*" . . . "This interview was some time before any publication was made on the subject." The first publication in which there is any allusion to this subject, may be found in the *Boston Surgical and Medical Journal*, of June 18th, 1845, and long before Morton pretends to have made any discovery whatever. Thus you, Dr. Mott, have sworn, in substance, that Wells was in this city announcing his great discovery early in



1845, announcing not only that the nitrous oxyd could be used, but that sulphuric ether had been also; or do you mean to un-swear not only your opinion, but a *fact* which is *conclusive* of the whole controversy, and to have it understood that the ex-Senator by some seductive influence obtained the mastery of your faculties and induced you to embark in the poor business of *romancing* under oath? No, no, Doctor! You stated the fact truly in the spirit of a man of honor and rectitude, (as you are,) and therefore your sworn opinion based on that fact, namely, "*as he*" (Wells) "*first applied ether for the purpose of producing Anæsthesia, he is fully entitled to the credit and honor of the discovery,*" stands good.

(5.) And as for you, Dr. Parker, I have a chapter of ethics to read to the public in connection with your course, which may possibly prove alike instructive and interesting.

But to a proper appreciation of the subject, a brief preliminary statement is necessary on my part. Anterior to the caption of the affidavits of Doctors Parker, Mott, and Francis, the friends of Mrs. Wells and child had put into my hands many affidavits, most of them taken at Hartford, but some of them in this city and elsewhere, proving conclusively that Dr. Wells did, at Hartford, in the fall of 1844, conceive the idea of anæsthesia and immediately introduced it into practice at that place, which he and others continued openly and notoriously up to the period of his death, January 24th, 1848, and that Morton was fully apprised of this discovery and practice long before he entered on experimentation at Boston. These proofs were from men of the highest standing and character, venerable clergymen, (including one Rt. Rev. Bishop,) judges, counsellors-at-law, surgeons, physicians, dentists, and many laymen. If there is such a thing as establishing any fact by human testimony, the case of H. W. was made impregnable in the manner stated.

But it was and is admitted, that the agent in the main, used by Wells, was the nitrous oxyd gas—it is true he had in some instances tried with success sulphuric ether, but fearing that the latter might prove injurious, and knowing that the former would not, he acted as any judicious and prudent man would under such circumstances, he used almost exclusively the nitrous oxyd. But the gas is unwieldy, and by no means as convenient as other agents, and it occurred to me that some attempt might be made to elevate Morton to the position and dignity of a discoverer, on account of the part which he took in the fall of 1846, and for a few months after in bringing the availability of sulphuric ether to the notice of the surgeons and physicians of Boston.

It was for the purpose of obtaining authoritative evidence in opposition to any such futile effort that I called on Drs. Parker, Mott, and Francis, in December, 1852, and for that purpose only. I was received by them very politely, for which they had and still have my thanks. They with one voice insisted that the effect of the nitrous oxyd and sulphuric ether had long been known to be similar, and they said it being first ascertained that a state of anæsthesia could be produced by the oxyd, it would be no discovery whatever to apply

the ether to the same end. I then asked them to draw up their own affidavits, which they accordingly did, and I now have them in my possession *in their own proper hand-writing*. I was not so presumptuous as to suggest either ideas or words, and they being perfectly conversant with all the facts, saw fit to go further, and to attribute in diverse language the whole merit of this great discovery to H. W. The public will be likely to think before I have done with this subject, that they then "hit the nail on the head," whatever they may say now.

Returning to Washington, and resuming my seat, it at length occurred to me that possibly in the debate which I then anticipated, some member might be impudent enough to deny the anæsthetic properties of the nitrous oxyd, or might insist that though available in the extraction of teeth, yet there was no proof that it could be used with success in great surgical operations. I then sat down and addressed Dr. Parker on the subject, proposing to send on to New York, Mr. John M. Riggs, the dentist of Hartford, then in the city of Washington, to have him prepare the nitrous oxyd, and administer it under the direction of the Doctor, in some capital case, to the end that he (Dr. P.) might certify to its availability in such cases as well as in dentistry. In reply, I received from the learned gentleman the following very remarkable letter—remarkable in view of the position he now takes:

"NEW-YORK, Jan. 25, 1853.

"DEAR SIR: Your letter reached me yesterday, and in answer I beg leave to say I will assist in the trial of the nitrous oxyd gas, provided we can have it prepared for our use by Dr. Riggs or any other person. The question is whether the gas will produce *anæsthesia*; if so, then it has its place as an anæsthetic agent with sulphuric ether, chloric ether, chloroform," etc.

"The *main question* is, who was the discoverer of the fact that a *state of anæsthesia* could be produced, and that with safety," (underscoring by the Doctor.)

"Which is the best agent to produce such a state is another question—a question, too, not yet decided. THE BOSTON NAMES ARE NOTHING TO THE QUESTION."

"Now, if the nitrous oxyd gas *can not produce an anæsthetic state*," (underscoring by the Dr. again,) "then Dr. Wells did not discover with that agent (and it is not claimed he did with any other) that a state of anæsthesia could be produced in the human subject."

"If by experiment we can produce a state of anæsthesia with the gas, then it must be admitted by Mr. Walker," (referring to the Hon. J. P. Walker, then a Senator from Wisconsin, and a strong supporter of the pretensions of Morton,) "and all others, that Dr. Wells is entitled to the honor of discovering *the fact*" (Dr. underscores,) "that an anæsthetic state can be produced, and the agent he employed was the nitrous oxyd gas. He did not use ether" (there the Doctor was mistaken) "nor chloroform, but others have since employed them as agents to produce *the same state*" (Dr. underscores) "which Dr.

Wells produced by another agent. Brandy will produce a state of anæsthesia also, and so will cold.

"The question, I again say, before the Committee is to my mind clear, namely, Who discovered *the great and transcendent fact*," (Dr. underscores,) "that the human system can be put into a state of *anæsthesia*," (the Doctor is emphatic again,) "so that teeth may be extracted and no pain, limbs may be severed and the system remain in a tranquil sleep? That is the question, and the only question, and not whether this agent or that agent was employed.

"*'JUSTITIA FIAT SIC CÆLUM RUAT.'* It can not be that the honest minds of distinguished Senators will be perverted, and an appropriation made on a FALSE ISSUE. I will aid in trying the gas, and if it be *inert*, then the claims of Dr. Wells will fall to the ground.

"Very truly yours,

W. PARKER."

Ah! Doctor, where are you now? Where is the pretense that you swore to an unsound and false opinion in favor of Wells, "in consequence of *the representations*" of Senator Smith? Is it not manifest that you knew all about the claim of Wells—indeed, that you were much better posted than he was on that subject. I defy human ingenuity to form a more just conception of the true issue then and now pending between Wells and Morton, or to state that issue in more just and appropriate terms *than you did*. You knew Wells had been using the nitrous oxyd at Hartford months before Morton pretends to have made any discovery at Boston; therefore you exclaim: "The question is whether the gas will produce anæsthesia!" Again: "Who was the discoverer of that fact that a state of anæsthesia can be produced, and that with safety?" And then, again: "Who discovered the great and transcendent fact that the human system can be put into such state, so that teeth may be extracted and no pain—limbs may be severed and the system may remain in a state of tranquillity?" And the solution of these questions you affirm in another part of your letter, may be reached by making in this city a new trial of the nitrous oxyd. "If," you say, "by experiment we can produce a state of anæsthesia with gas, IT MUST BE ADMITTED by Mr. Walker and all others, that DR. WELLS IS ENTITLED TO THE HONOR OF DISCOVERING THE FACT THAT AN ANÆSTHETIC STATE CAN BE PRODUCED," and the agent which he used *you* affirm over and over is wholly immaterial. You seemed to be overwhelmed with anxiety, lest the Senate should attach some importance to the properties or nature of the agent used by Morton—that you affirm would be to make an appropriation on "*a false issue*." Morton had appeared at Washington with a long string of Boston names to advance his claims, but you say justly, "the Boston names are nothing to the question." How is it now; good Doctor? You have added your name to the Boston names! Is that adding nothing to what you say was nothing before? Certain New-York names are found on both sides of this question—*wriggling in both scales*. I am inclined to think they are worse than nothing—



that they are in a marked degree a negative quantity. You seem, learned sir! to be fond of Latin maxims—here is one for your edification, "*Litera scripta remanet*"—next time you propose to swear one way, and then certify the reverse, I advise you to write no letters on the subject. Bad affairs these letters are to the uncandid and prevaricating.

So much for the naughty conduct of a United States Senator in seducing two distinguished Professors of Surgery and Medicine of the city of New-York into the unhappy business of swearing to opinions when they hadn't any, though it strikes me "the boot should be put on t'other leg," and if any body was seduced, it was the Senator. It is true, I attached some weight to the opinions of these gentlemen, but I agree I was mistaken. I now think they were not worth one straw, and very likely the public will think so too.

But by far the most important part of the statement of Doctors Parker and Mott, is that which (after showing how they had been induced by representations, etc., to swear the other way) concludes as follows: "We feel it to be our duty to state, that a subsequent and careful examination of the facts in the history of the discovery of Anæsthesia, has led us to a different conclusion," and then they go on to add, "whatever may have been the steps preliminary to this remarkable discovery, Dr. Morton's claim to it is established beyond all controversy, and his merits in this respect with those who have taken the trouble to inform themselves on the subject, can be no longer a question in dispute."

This is certainly going it pretty extensively. Here the learned gentlemen say, that after having sworn in favor of Wells, they *carefully* examined "into the facts in the history of anæsthesia," and were "led to a different conclusion." This would seem to be a *little* diffident and modest, but then they all at once break out with the asseveration that Morton's "claim is established beyond all controversy"—"no longer a question of dispute" "with those who have taken the trouble to inform themselves." This is the same thing as to say, that the multitude of citizens of Boston, New-York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and, in short, in all parts of the country, (many of them distinguished members of their own profession,) who verily believe H. W. to be the true and only discover of the principle of anæsthesia, and the first to introduce it into practice, are profoundly ignorant on that subject—that they and those who act with them have alone looked into, and understand the case.

But you, Messrs. Parker and Mott, it seems, have gone into a "careful examination of the facts in the history of the discovery of anæsthesia," and that, too, subsequent to your swearing the other way. When? where? how? where did you do it? at what place? Was it in New-York, Boston, or Hartford, or in neither? When was it? Was it since Morton arrived in this city, in pursuit of a great "national testimonial" with a list of "Boston names," for which you, Dr. Parker, had so much contempt in 1852? How have you done it? Have you called for proofs? Have you given notice to the parties, or has your inquiry been wholly *ex parte*? Have you ever sent to

Hartford, to ascertain the facts? Have you, Dr. Parker, made the experiment, on which you declared, in your letter of Jan. 25th, 1853, the whole issue must turn, namely, whether the nitrous oxyd will produce on the human system an anæsthetic effect? I deny that such trial has ever been made in this city; certainly it has not been by you; and yet you pretend to have examined carefully into the subject. You have not taken even the first step indispensable to "a careful examination." And what is much more grave, I have to say you knew, or had reason to know, that I am the custodian of all the proofs on the Wells side of the question. Here is one from the Rt. Rev. Bishop Brownell, of Hartford, Conn., which I select out of several scores:

"I, Thomas C. Brownell, of the city and county of Hartford, depose and say, that on or about the 1st of January, 1848, my daughter, Frances J. Brownell, had five teeth extracted by Dr. Riggs, a dentist of this city, she being, at the time, under the influence of nitrous oxyd gas, administered to her by the late Dr. Wells. I was present at the operation, and saw no evidence that my daughter was conscious of suffering, and she told me afterwards that she felt no pain during the operation. A few weeks afterwards she had three more teeth extracted, while under the influence of ether, and with little appearance of suffering, though she thought it less genial in its effects than the nitrous oxyd gas, and such was my own judgment of its operation.

T. C. BROWNELL."

Sworn to before, HENRY L. RIDER, N. P.

And yet you have not condescended to call for these proofs! not for one of them! but without any other than a one-sided inquiry, you have dared to say to the public you have made "a careful examination into the facts," etc.

Let those believe who choose to—*I do not!*

As for you, Dr. Francis, it is manifest that you act on the sentiment of the immortal Falstaff: that "the better part of valor is discretion." Your P. S. to the card of Drs. Mott and Parker is truly diplomatic. You do not pretend to take back what you swore to before, but you seem to think that although Wells may have discovered the principle and introduced the practice of anæsthesia, yet through the "experiments, perseverance, and energy" of Morton, "it was made manifest, that sulphuric ether might be used as an effective anæsthetic agent in surgical operations;" thus passing by the prime discoverer, the great benefactor of mankind, to bestow all the rewards, if not all the honors, on a party who acted a very subordinate part in the matter. I have said before that I would be willing to acknowledge some merit in Morton, had he placed himself on any grounds consistent with rectitude and truth. But he has utterly denied the claims of Wells, and controverted his ease at every point. A subordinate party may be entitled to great credit, but much depends on the motive which characterizes his course. If he lays hold of the discovery of another, and seeks to appropriate it to himself, *cum animo*

*fürandi*, his is a detestable character, and should be scouted from the respect and confidence of all honorable men. Whether Wm. T. G. Morton stands before the public in any such attitude, the candid and discriminating must judge. I dismiss him to the patronage of all those who choose to be humbugged.

In my former communication I stated that I had stood pretty much alone in efforts to assert the claims of Dr. Wells and the rights of his widow and child; but I am happy to say that this is to be so no longer, as will appear from the following communication, which I have recently received from the Right Rev. Bishop Brownell, Ex-Chief Justice Williams, and other citizens of Hartford of high distinction :

HARTFORD, Dec. 13th, 1858.

"HON. TRUMAN SMITH :

"DEAR SIR : As the city of Hartford had the honor of giving birth to anæsthesia or the use of gases and vapors for the relief of pain, and believing that the claims of the late Horace Wells, as the author of that discovery, have not been brought as fully before the world as the case demands, we request you, at your convenience, to give our citizens a history of that great discovery and the efforts made to deprive Dr. Wells of his just rights.

"T. C. Brownell, Thos. S. Williams, Wm. W. Ellsworth, Seth Terry, B. Hudson, Harvey Seymour, James W. Bunce, T. M. Allyn, S. B. Beresford, M.D. ; B. Rogers, M.D. ; P. M. Hastings, M.D. ; A. W. Barrows, and P. W. Ellsworth."

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I have designated the evening of Monday, the third proximo, for the meeting; and of course the learned Dr. Parker can not have any objection to my taking with me his original affidavit and letter, together with his recent card; possibly they may prove to the meeting alike instructive and amusing.

In conclusion, Messrs. Editors, permit me to say that the public must not infer from a brief editorial under the caption "Anæsthesia," contained in your paper of the 16th instant, (in which you state in substance that I have undertaken the prosecution of the claims of the family of Dr. Wells,) that I am in any sense employed as their counsel, or that I am deriving or expect to derive any (the slightest) benefit from the assertion of those claims. I do not pretend to be more disinterested than other men, but the truth is, I became enlisted in this cause in my representative capacity; and knowing all the facts, I felt that I ought not to remain silent while an attempt is being made to practise what I consider a great imposition on the people of New-York. Dated at New-York, Dec. 22d, A.D. 1858.

TRUMAN SMITH.







Accession no.

7290

Author

Smith, Truman  
Anaesthesia!

Call no.

ANESTH<sup>012</sup>

III

